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Security Council

Sixty-third year

Provisional

5983rd meeting

Friday, 26 September 2008, 11.15 a.m.

New York

President:	Mr. Yoda	(Burkina Faso)
Members:	Belgium	Mr. De Gucht
	China	Mr. Li Kexin
	Costa Rica	Mr. Stagno Ugarte
	Croatia	Mr. Jandroković
	France	Mr. Kouchner
	Indonesia	Mr. Wirajuda
	Italy	Mr. Frattini
	Libyan Arab Jamahiriya	Mr. Ettalhi
	Panama	Mr. Arias
	Russian Federation	Mr. Saltanov
	South Africa	Ms. Dlamini Zuma
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Miliband
	United States of America	Ms. Rice
	Viet Nam	Mr. Le Luong Minh

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

Letter dated 22 September 2008 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of Saudi Arabia to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2008/615)

* Reissued for technical reasons.

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08-52327* (E)

The meeting was called to order at 11.15 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

Letter dated 22 September 2008 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of Saudi Arabia to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2008/615)

The President (*spoke in French*): I should like to inform the Council that I have received letters from the representatives of Israel and Saudi Arabia, in which they request to be invited to participate in the consideration of the item on the Council's agenda. In conformity with the usual practice, I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite those representatives to participate in the consideration of the item, without the right to vote, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Charter and rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

On behalf of the Council, I extend a warm welcome to His Royal Highness Prince Saud Al-Faisal, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Saudi Arabia.

At the invitation of the President, Ms. Shalev (Israel) and Prince Saud Al-Faisal (Saudi Arabia) took seats at the Council table.

The President (*spoke in French*): I should like to inform the Council that I have received a letter dated 25 September 2008 from the Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations, which will be issued as document S/2008/623 and which reads as follows:

> "I have the honour to request that, in accordance with its previous practice, the Security Council invite the Permanent Observer of Palestine to participate in the meeting of the Security Council which will be held on Friday, 26 September 2008, regarding the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question."

I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite His Excellency Mr. Mahmoud Abbas, President of the Palestinian National Authority, to participate in the meeting, in accordance with the rules of procedure and previous practice in this regard.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

At the invitation of the President, Mr. Abbas (Palestine) took a seat at the Council table.

The President (*spoke in French*): I should like to inform the Council that I have received a letter dated 25 September 2008 from the Permanent Representative of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya to the United Nations, in which he requests that the Council extend an invitation to His Excellency Mr. Amre Moussa, Secretary-General of the League of Arab States, to participate in this meeting. If I hear no objection, I shall take it that the Council agrees to extend an invitation under rule 39 to Mr. Amre Moussa.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

I invite Mr. Moussa to take a seat at the Council table.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda. The Council is meeting in response to a letter dated 22 September 2008 from the Chargé d'affaires ad interim of the Permanent Mission of Saudi Arabia to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council and contained in document S/2008/615.

I now give the floor to His Royal Highness Prince Saud Al-Faisal.

Prince Al-Faisal (Saudi Arabia): I wish to thank the Security Council for granting us this opportunity to meet and discuss an urgent and significant matter that is affecting the credibility of the peace process in the Middle East as well as the universal application of international law.

All the members of the League of Arab States have requested this urgent meeting of the Security Council to discuss the problem of the continued Israeli settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territories, for it is the one issue that threatens to bring down the whole peace process. Our sincere hope is that the meeting will further the purposes of the United Nations with respect to upholding the principles of international law and that it will help to save from failure the Annapolis peace process and the ongoing Palestinian-Israeli negotiations.

Needless to say, the Arab-Israeli conflict continues to overshadow and dominate all other issues in the Middle East. No regional crisis has greater potential to affect world peace than that conflict. The absence of good faith and the intransigence on the part of the Israeli Government compound the problem. Instead of pursuing an honest quest for peace, Israel continues to take more and more of the Palestinian territories, persisting in the daily humiliation of the population and building illegal settlements and walls so as to unilaterally create new facts on the ground.

Israeli settlements, which are changing the geographic and demographic composition of the occupied Palestinian territories, are clearly in direct violation of the principles of international law, of all relevant United Nations resolutions and of obligations under the Road Map and the Annapolis process.

Israeli settlements surround most of the major Palestinian population centres in the West Bank and control more than half of its water resources. In East Jerusalem, excavation and construction continue unabated. In short, those Israeli settlements make it virtually impossible to envision the establishment of a viable Palestinian State in the future. They make it extremely difficult for any Palestinian Government to function effectively, or to convince Palestinians of the feasibility of peace.

It is immoral to apply sanctions on occupied people while the occupier continues its settlement activities with impunity. We are not asking for anything that was not promised by the Israelis themselves at Annapolis. Since such illegal Israeli practices pre-empt the current negotiations and render them meaningless, Israel should, at a minimum, cease all settlement activities, including the issuance of permits.

All Arab Governments, including the present Palestinian Government, have proposed a collective offer to end the conflict with Israel and enter into a peace agreement that provides security, recognition and normal relations for all States of the region. These are extremely serious powerful pledges by all Arab States which should not be ignored. They reflect the strategic choice of peace opted for by the Arab countries.

The only path to true Israeli security is peace. We have to question Israel's refusal to offer meaningful peace initiatives. Its obfuscation and reliance on unilateral measures will never lead to peace. It is time for Israel to understand that it cannot continue to exempt itself from complying with international standards of behaviour based on international law.

What we are requesting here is very simple, yet very important. Most of us gathered here, including the permanent members of the Security Council, have made unilateral declarations against continued Israeli settlement activities. What is needed is to take a united stand that clearly reflects this existing consensus.

Time is of the essence. The moment for serious action is upon us. Stagnation in the peace process has increased the appeal of extremist ideologies. Feelings of despair and frustration have reached a dangerously high level. The growing perception in the Arab and Muslim world that there is a lack of seriousness on the part of the international community on this matter must be addressed.

In this meeting we have not asked for any action such as a resolution or statement. However, we request that this meeting remains open until an appropriate conclusion is reached during the remainder of this United Nations session. If not, we shall come back to this Council and ask it to shoulder its responsibility.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Amre Moussa, Secretary-General of the League of Arab States.

Mr. Moussa (*spoke in Arabic*): Mr. President, at the outset, I should like to pay tribute to your wise leadership of the difficult negotiations that led to the convening of this meeting of the Security Council to consider the situation in the occupied Palestinian territories.

This situation has deteriorated, indeed, escalated through the continued building of Israeli settlements as well as the effect of such settlement activities on a comprehensive peace settlement, between Israel and Palestine, and also between Arab countries and Israel.

(*spoke in English*)

Two years ago, in September 2006, at the request of the League of Arab States, the Council convened with the goal of reviving the peace process which was paralysed and ineffective. That meeting was held at the ministerial level and recorded a clear consensus on the necessity of reviving the peace process with the express goal of establishing a viable Palestinian State in the West Bank and Gaza, with, of course, East Jerusalem as its capital.

The meeting also recorded unanimous support for reviving peace negotiations aimed at reaching a comprehensive peace that would put an end to the occupation of the Arab lands and lead to the establishment of normal relations between Arabs and Israelis so that both sides can live in peace and security.

That initiative marked the second peace proposal that the Arab side had undertaken after the Arab initiative of 2002. Our efforts led to the revival of the peace process. This time we were heeded by the current United States Administration, and hence came the invitation to the Annapolis Conference where four objectives were underlined.

The first objective was the reaffirmation of President Bush's promise to have a viable Palestinian State established by the end of this year, 2008. The second objective was the resumption of active negotiations between the Palestinians and the Israelis. The third was to achieve an immediate and complete halt of settlement activity, as was very clearly specified in the Road Map. The fourth objective was to achieve a comprehensive peace that includes all three tracks: Palestinian, Syrian and Lebanese. I would have hoped that both Syrians and Lebanese would have had a voice today at this meeting.

Regrettably, most of those objectives have not been attained. First of all, three months are left in 2008 and there is no evidence that the establishment of the promised Palestinian State is anywhere near. Secondly, negotiations have not produced any agreement. Nothing has been written or formally proposed. The Israeli side has completely refused to put anything into written form. So, the result of those negotiations remains in the negative realm.

This confirms the absence of political will on the Israeli side to accept the prospect of a real and viable Palestinian State on an equal footing with Israel. It seems that the objective is to resort to sessions of photo opportunities and protracted meetings as a substitute for the proactive and productive negotiations that are required for achieving peace.

The continuation of this situation will have serious negative repercussions on regional security as well as on the prospect of a comprehensive Arab-Israeli peace, which is the goal of the Arab side.

Furthermore, while the Palestinian and Israeli representatives were engaged in those sessions, the Israelis were busy building settlements and changing the demographic composition and geographic character of the Palestinian territories, thus rendering the negotiations irrelevant.

Thirdly, as for the understanding in Annapolis that settlement activity shall stop, that the so-called outposts shall be removed, that hundreds of the roadblocks that make the daily life of the Palestinian miserable shall be lifted: not one of those commitments has been honoured. Not one. It should be noted that those commitments were part of the first phase of the Road Map.

As for the comprehensive nature of the peace process, and although we follow with interest the current Syrian-Israeli indirect talks under Turkish auspices, many of us do not really entertain much hope of achieving significant progress, because of the same reasons: Israel's refusal to assume the responsibilities of peace and its greed for territory and settlements.

We came to the Council today to underscore that the consolidation and escalation of the settlement policies and practices in the occupied territories have reached a point at which they are capable of killing any hope for a viable Palestinian State. How can we expect a viable State in territories dissected by illegal settlements, threatened by violent settlers, and divided by roads dedicated to settlers and settlements alone, at the expense of Palestinian territorial integrity, adjacency and economic and social viability? How can we expect a viable State with the continued Israeli practices in and around Jerusalem, including excavations at the holy sites, and at Bab el-Mughrabi in particular, and other construction projects around Al-Aqsa Mosque, in clear violation of international law, including humanitarian law and the Fourth Geneva Convention?

We see the hopes for a fair peace evaporating because of the lack of intent and political will of the Israeli political elite and ruling class. We see prospects for a viable Palestinian State diminishing because of the irresponsible and frantic policy of building settlements. Settlements are entirely illegal. Unfortunately, that Israeli policy has been allowed to come into being and to continue unabated by the immunity given to Israeli practices vis-à-vis international law and protected by complacency.

We came to the Council to caution and warn that the current situation cannot lead to anything but chaos, the unleashing of violence, the promotion of hatred and the disappearance of the remaining vestiges of the spirit of peace. I wish to stress before this Council that the settlement activities in the occupied territories have made the Palestinian State a mere mirage that serves as a moving carrot offered to the Arabs to keep running after until they discover the illusion and that there is no place for a Palestinian State. That sinister scenario has made some in several circles start looking for alternatives to the dream of the two-State solution.

Having outlined the aforementioned, I wish to reiterate that we, the Arab community of nations, continue until now to abide by the terms of our peace initiative. We continue to offer the hand of peace to the Israelis. We invite the Israeli people, who should be stakeholders of peace like all of us on the Arab side, to reconsider and revisit the Arab offer of peace contained in the Arab peace initiative that was formally presented to the Government of Israel not so long ago by the two representatives of the League of Arab States, the foreign ministers of Egypt and Jordan. We call on the Israeli people again, as stakeholders of peace, to mobilize against the destructive settlement policy. We call on them to have faith in peace as the gateway to security and prosperity, and for stable existence and coexistence with the Arab world.

Finally, we need no more bloodshed. We need no more occupation. We need no more settlements and no more civilian casualties. What we need is more seriousness in tackling the Arab-Israeli conflict. What we need is an honest broker and honest brokering to lead the work.

Let me end by stating that, in the coming several weeks, if our efforts to rescue the peace process do not succeed and should prove to be an exercise in futility, we shall come to the Security Council again for action. The Council is owned by the international community — by all of us — and cannot remain indifferent or shirk its responsibilities as the principal organ of the United Nations responsible for the maintenance of international peace and security. It is the responsibility of the Council to protect the legitimate rights of peoples, and in this case the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people. Any hesitation by the Council would open the door for other venues to be probed. We shall no longer follow illusions, believe promises or tolerate insults to our intelligence and to our self-respect.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Mahmoud Abbas, President of the Palestinian Authority.

Mr. Abbas (*spoke in Arabic*): I should like to warmly thank you, Sir, for convening this important meeting, which gives us an opportunity to describe in detail the situation prevailing in the occupied Palestinian territories and to identify the obstacles ahead and the means to achieve a peaceful settlement that includes the two-State solution.

I am deeply grateful to all those who have contributed to the organization of this meeting. I pay tribute to the tireless efforts of His Royal Highness Prince Saud Al-Faisal and the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States to ensure that the meeting would be held.

Allow me first and foremost to clarify a number of historical issues that are neither redundant nor dull. In that regard, I wish to point to the historical map that figures in the dossier circulated in the Chamber. The map shows the configuration of the Palestinian territory beginning in 1937. An Israeli State is shown in white and an Arab State in yellow. The partition took place in 1947. The project was unsuccessful and war broke out, leading to the current situation in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

If we are to understand the situation properly, we need to recognize the outlines of the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and the Palestinian territory on which we hope to establish an independent, viable Palestinian State living side by side with an Israeli State in harmony, peace and stability. That is the point of departure allowing us to understand all the aspects of the question we are seized with today.

Since the war that broke out between the Arab countries and Israel in 1967, the latter has built settlements in the West Bank. Those settlement activities have continued from that day to this. In that regard, I recall that the Security Council has adopted more than 10 resolutions prohibiting such settlement activities, which are considered an impediment to peace. Some – in particular resolutions 252 (1968), 298 (1971), 465 (1980) and 446 (1979) — even call for the dismantling of settlements. Those are some of the resolutions adopted by the Security Council, all of

them either condemning the settlement policy or calling for the elimination of settlements. There is also a resolution specifically addressing the question of Jerusalem, by which the Security Council considered the building of settlements in Jerusalem to be an illegal act that must be halted immediately.

I am recalling all of this in order to stress that the issue of settlement activity is nothing new: it goes back to the 1960s and 1970s. Despite all the resolutions that have been adopted, nothing has changed.

On the settlement policy, let me note that there had been 22 settlements in the Gaza Strip, which occupied nearly 30 per cent of the territory of the Strip. The Israeli Government then took the wise if somewhat unilateral decision to eliminate those settlements. That was done, even though the pretext offered for the destruction of those settlements was unconvincing — for example, claiming that these were holy territories and formed part of Israel. But in the end, the Israeli Government did indeed eliminate those settlements — practically overnight.

The current situation is reflected on the map I am holding. It depicts the three settlement blocs in the West Bank: Ariel, in the north; Ma'ale Adummim, near Jerusalem; and Kfar Etzion to the south. The presence of those three blocs in the north, near Jerusalem and in the south could lead one to believe that they preclude the emergence of a viable, contiguous and independent Palestinian State: the three settlement blocs divide the West Bank into no less than four cantons. That means that President Bush's expressed vision of the emergence of a viable, contiguous and independent Palestinian State will not be realized, even though it is an integral part of the Road Map, which is in turn endorsed in Security Council resolution 1515 (2003).

That is the situation we are facing today. These facts convince us that the settlements not only are an obstacle, but also threaten to completely undermine the peace process, because the settlement policy has an impact on other fundamental issues, such as water, boundaries and Jerusalem. It also has an impact on the demographic presence of Palestinians: the separation wall now cuts off 14 Palestinian villages and besieges about 60 Palestinian villages.

Given the current situation, I would ask how we can talk of the emergence of a viable, independent Palestinian State living side by side with Israel.

By the terms of phase I of the Road Map, as endorsed at the Annapolis Conference, an immediate end must be put to the settlement policy, including the "natural growth" of settlements, and the arbitrary outposts that have been erected must be dismantled. But nothing has been done. Settlement activity continues unabated, and the same policy remains in place right up to the banks of the river Jordan. As members know, settlements are not confined to the three blocs I mentioned earlier: they are scattered throughout the West Bank, even on the banks of the Jordan, where dozens of settlements exist.

That is the situation relating to the Jewish settlements that have been erected, even though we have called for a suspension of settlement-building and have engaged in negotiations with the Government of Israel. How can I convince my people to negotiate with Israel when settlements systematically continue to be built, inch by inch and bite by bite?

We have seen the adoption of the Road Map and the establishment of the Quartet, which is responsible for monitoring the implementation of phase I of the Road Map. There is no denying that the Israeli side made commitments, and at a time when we are fulfilling our duties and shouldering our responsibilities to the extent possible, there must be a response: the Israeli side must put an immediate end to its settlement policy in all its aspects, including "natural growth", and the more than 100 arbitrary outposts must be dismantled. Even the Israeli Government considers them to be illegal.

Unfortunately, the situation remains unchanged. We have heard some 50 speakers at the Annapolis Conference; all of them repeatedly referred to the settlement policy and called for its termination. But, unfortunately, nothing has happened. Even the French President, when addressing the Knesset and when he spoke with us, spoke unequivocally of the need to put an end to the settlement policy. Despite all of that, nothing has been done. The United States Secretary of State, Ms. Rice, has also raised the issue. But none of this has had any impact: there has been no positive response, and the settlement policy continues.

In addition to all these elements is the changing of the character of Jerusalem, including Bab al-Maghariba. Everyone agrees on the facts, and they are stipulated in the Geneva Conventions and in the Israeli-Jordanian agreement. All such agreements

stipulate that no change must be made to the character of that city. But despite that, and despite all the fine resolutions that have been adopted, we have nothing tangible that would improve the situation with our Israeli neighbours. Pretexts have been put forward and arguments have been made; for example, we have heard the Israeli Government claim that it opposes the settlement policy and that the responsibility lies with the mayor. How can the Government be contradicting the mayor? How can the Government be unable to compel a mayor or the city government to put an end to these activities? Projects have occasionally been broached — such as paying compensation to affected settlers — but nothing of the kind has happened and the settlement policy continues nonetheless.

Yet we are obliged to pursue negotiations that are crucial both for us and for the Israeli side — despite the virulent criticism we receive on a daily basis from everyone, including from Palestinian leaders, who regularly ask how we can pursue negotiations while the settlement policy continues. If we remain on the path of negotiations it is because we cherish peace, and peace remains our main objective. But that does not mean that our agenda will not give high priority to the settlements issue. It has been noted that tenders for construction contracts continue to be issued. NGOs that tackle this issue have referred to a catastrophe with regard to continued settlement policies. These settlements have not helped to improve the chances for peace at all.

Thirdly, with regard to the settlers, we are quite familiar with their aggression. There have been acts of aggression by the settlers against the inhabitants of the region. The settlers do not hesitate to invade villages if they consider that necessary, not to mention the acts of official military aggression. Even the settlers feel free to invade villages, plunder and even kill the residents — as if it was not enough that the land of those villages had already been seized, that the people were already under siege and are also victims of murder and aggression.

Certainly we cannot tolerate that situation. If the settlement policy seeks to present us with a fait accompli, we shall continue to reject it. We still say that Israeli settlement policy is illegal, and we will not accept it. The map that I showed the Council shows 22 per cent of historic Palestine. We have accepted that small percentage allocated to us, imposed on us by the international community. We are prepared to bend to the will of the international community. Thus we accepted the 22 per cent. But even that 22 per cent is difficult for us to obtain. So how can we arrive at peace?

We have come to the Council to ask it to shoulder its responsibility and to say that we are ready to negotiate and that we will pursue these negotiations. I will pursue them with Mr. Olmert, and I will never cease to negotiate, even with his successor. We do not wish to waste the opportunities available to us, but we call on the Council to assume its responsibilities. It is for the Council to implement the dozens of resolutions that date back to the 1970s and 1980s — resolutions that the Council itself adopted. How can they be respected, those resolutions that are still dead letters? They must be implemented. There are about 15 resolutions that have still not been implemented. It is truly a serious matter.

Unless the settlement policy is ended, it will be futile to dream of the peace that we all hope for. If we fail, if we do not obtain peace, then the alternative poses a serious threat. Everyone knows what the alternative will be. It will once again plunge the entire region, not only the Palestinian territories, into a hellish cycle of violence. I do not even wish to imagine what that might lead us to. We thus urge the Council to be on its guard. We want to recall that we are opposed to violence and terrorism. We are against anything that leads to violence. We wish to negotiate for peace.

However, if we are unsuccessful in that venture, then what to do? Fait accompli does not lead to peace; understanding might lead to peace. The desire for peace could lead us to authentic peace. I hope that that will for peace will take shape so that we do obtain an authentic peace. Believe me, if peace is established between Palestinians and Israelis, and also between the Syrians and the Lebanese and Israel, then peace will reign not only in the region; it will even surpass the boundaries of our region. And that is a prerequisite; it is indispensable for all of us here.

The Council is responsible for global security, and in its hand global security lies. Therefore it is the Council's responsibility to shoulder its duty.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Israel.

Ms. Shalev (Israel): I wish to thank you, Mr. President, for your stewardship of this Council. As

your presidency comes to an end, please accept my congratulations.

If a stranger was seated among us today, he would be under the impression that the Israeli settlements in the West Bank are the primary and single obstacle to peace in the region. It would appear to that stranger that Hamas' violent coup in Gaza, its enormous smuggling of weapons, its constant missile attacks on Israeli towns and cities are not a problem. To that stranger, the phenomenon of terrorism against Israel and its citizens, including the attacks in Jerusalem this week, is a fact of life.

To that stranger, Iran's pursuit of nuclear weapons and its support of Hizbullah and Hamas are irrelevant details. To that stranger, President Ahmadinejad's despicable calls for the destruction of Israel are just words. To that stranger, the transfer of weapons from Iran and Syria into northern and southern Lebanon and the rearmament of Hizbullah do not merit discussion. With the same logic, books filled with hatred and anti-Israel incitement have nothing to do with the badly needed culture of peace.

Had the stranger arrived in these halls without any prior knowledge of the situation in the Middle East, he would not have known that those dangers and problems prevail in our region. Mysteriously, all previous speakers failed to mention those facts. Israel's settlements, however, falsely appear to be the principal issue. Something seems strangely amiss.

But we are no strangers to the realities on the ground and to the mutual attempts to try to reach a real solution to the Arab-Israeli dispute — a solution through negotiations on the ground, not with words in the Security Council.

We in Israel remain committed to achieving a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East. We in Israel are committed to a two-State solution with our Palestinian neighbours. For us in Israel, the question is not whether to achieve a two-State solution but how to do so.

Israel understands its responsibilities as the peace process moves forward. We continue to negotiate with the legitimate Palestinian leadership despite the complicated situation, which includes, unfortunately, many threats and obstacles. We are willing to discuss all aspects related to the conflict. I wish to state, without any ambiguity whatsoever, that Israel is prepared, if the conditions are ripe, to make painful concessions in the pursuit of peace. Israel has done so in the past because Israel desires peace.

Let me also state clearly that settlements are not an obstacle to peace. Yes, we understand the sensitivity of the issue of settlements in the eyes of our neighbours. Yes, there is also parallel sensitivity on our side due to the historic bond of the Jewish people to this biblical land. However, while settlements remain a delicate issue, they are not the principal one. They have been used here as another instrument to bash Israel instead of addressing the realities on the ground.

Any progress begins with a genuine dialogue among those committed to peace. It begins with the release of Israeli hostage Corporal Gilad Shalit and an end to all terrorist attacks. It begins with a renewal of everyone's commitment to the two-State solution and an acceptance of the basic principle that the rights of each people are to be realized in their own homeland. It begins by overcoming all threats to the realization of peace.

While the peace process between us and the Palestinians is essentially a bilateral one, the rest of the Arab world has an important, vital role indeed, since that peace will bind together Israelis, Palestinians and all moderates in the region.

There is much that those in the region can do to support the process, but it is not about more United Nations meetings. First and foremost, it is about the commitment to prepare the people of the region for the price of peace, to accept the true meaning of peace and to teach all children of the Middle East the values of tolerance and the blessings of coexistence, not the values of incitement and hatred.

The Arab world is a pivotal player in any effort to strengthen elements within the Palestinian leadership. The Council has a critical responsibility to support the moderate Palestinian Authority and denounce Hamas. It must condemn terrorism and incitement. It must reject extremism, such as the toxic anti-Israel and anti-Semitic provocations of Iranian President Ahmadinejad. It must accept Israel's existence and the Jewish people's right of self-determination in our homeland.

To the representatives from the Arab world, I say: Israel understands its responsibilities for peace. Faced with today's Council discussion, we cannot but wonder

whether the Arab leaders really understand their responsibilities.

Those who initiated this Council discussion in the belief that it will contribute to the promotion of peace are wrong. Efforts should be made on the ground by confronting all obstacles to peace and by establishing confidence-building measures with Israel. As I said before, our region is facing many threats. International terrorism, to name but one, is the black plague of the twenty-first century. May I ask how many times this Council has initiated a serious debate on the threat of terrorism in the Middle East?

Some in this Chamber might find comfort in the mantra that Israeli settlements are the primary impediment to peace, yet that belief is utterly wrong and blind to the historical realities. Let me take us back to the peace treaty between Israel and Egypt signed 30 years ago. Let me take us back to Gaza in 2005. Time and time again, Israel has demonstrated to itself and to the world that settlements, no matter how sensitive an issue, are not the obstacle to peace when the conditions are ripe.

The Middle East is at a critical juncture and the moderate Arab States have two paths before them. One leads us down a road of excuses and false alibis, as the peace process stumbles. The other path is one that creates the foundations for a just and lasting peace.

Today's meeting comes dangerously close to choosing the first option. We all must choose the second. In his remarks to the General Assembly two days ago, Israeli President Shimon Peres extended yet another olive branch to the Arab world, stating that Israel invites "all leaders to come to discuss peace in Jerusalem, which is holy to all of us ... Israel shall gladly accept an Arab invitation to designate a venue where meaningful dialogue may take place" (*A/63/PV.7*).

Today, we echo that call and urge our Arab neighbours to reciprocate President Peres' offer. Calling politically motivated meetings, such as today's at the Security Council, serves no such goal. The initiative to hold today's discussion in the Council and the presentation we have seen and heard here today do not promote peace. Only bilateral negotiations will help us achieve a just and lasting peace.

In contrast, I would like to draw the attention of the Council to the bilateral talks that have taken place in recent weeks between Prime Minister Olmert, Foreign Minister Livni and their Palestinian counterparts on all substantive issues. What could be more symbolic, in further contrast to today's Council meeting, than the meeting that took place a short while ago in this very building, two floors below us, between President Shimon Peres and President Mahmoud Abbas.

True progress is made through such bilateral meetings. That is the only way to move forward, the only way to achieve peace.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the His Excellency Mr. Bernard Kouchner, Minister for Foreign Affairs of France.

Mr. Kouchner (France) (*spoke in French*): France believes that this meeting is important. Settlement activities have been stepped up since Annapolis. With its European partners, France has had the opportunity to state clearly and repeatedly its concerns at that accelerated building of settlements and the tenders, namely in East Jerusalem. The European Union (EU) believes that the building of settlements anywhere in the Palestinian occupied territories is illegal with respect to international law. It harms the credibility of the process started in Annapolis and affects the viability of the future necessary, indispensable Palestinian State; it makes the development of the Palestinian economy more difficult; and finally, it causes tension, as illustrated by the recent exactions of the settlers with regard to the Palestinians.

On 23 June in the Knesset, the President of France recalled that for France there can be "no peace without an immediate and complete halt to settlement". I recall that very decisive position in view of the threat posed by the violent speeches, and particularly the speech of the Iranian President, who again delivered an unacceptable message a few days ago before the General Assembly.

In parallel with our messages on the necessary freeze on the settlements, naturally we call on the Palestinian Authority, as we have always done, also to meet its commitment, particularly to continue its efforts to combat terrorism and attacks in all their forms, as well as arms trafficking, as the representative of Israel has just emphasized.

We want peace with all our heart. We support peace efforts, wherever they may be made, with all our strength. Thus, we support the Palestinian authorities in their reform of the security service and welcome the success of the steps taken in Jenin, for example. Finally, we welcome the continuation of the truce concluded on 19 June in Gaza, hoping that it will help to improve the humanitarian conditions of the people, the suffering of the people in Gaza and the chances for a prompt release of Gilad Shalit.

France is convinced that the Israelis and the Palestinians can achieve peace, and in that respect, of course, I recall the important Arab peace initiative. There will be no security in Israel without a democratic and viable Palestinian State at its side and no security for the world without peace in all the countries of the Middle East.

Accordingly, France stands ready, particularly with its EU partners, to contribute to the implementation of an agreement that must be able to be sealed as soon as possible. One year after the Paris conference, which raised a lot of money and aid to build that Palestinian State, we are ready to make an additional and decisive effort to consolidate the hope for peace. Now that a solution is within reach, we expect our Israeli and Palestinian partners to seize that opportunity and take historic decisions in the interests of their peoples and stability throughout the entire region.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to Her Excellency Ms. Condoleezza Rice, Secretary of State of the United States of America.

Ms. Rice (United States of America): I come to the Council at a time when I think it will be very well understood that the United States of America, President Bush and myself personally have been very committed to the Annapolis process and to finding a lasting and permanent peace between Israelis and Palestinians, the establishment of a Palestinian State to live side by side in peace, security and democracy with the people of Israel.

I come to the Council at a time when we can all look back on just one year ago when there was no peace process. Now there is a viable, robust peace process. I come to the Council at a time when Israelis and Palestinians are continuing their negotiations towards the establishment of a two-State solution despite complications on both sides. I note, for instance, the meeting between President Peres and President Abu Mazen earlier today and the meeting earlier this week between Foreign Minister Livni and Abu Alaa. I note also that President Bush met yesterday with President Abbas and that I will do so later today.

I want to note also that the Quartet will meet later today to discuss the Annapolis process and how to bring support to the parties as they seek a comprehensive peace. The Quartet is the proper forum for those discussions and I very much look forward to that meeting later on today.

I want to note that the Annapolis process expects not only political negotiations, but also progress on the ground, particularly for people of the Palestinian territories, and the fulfilment of road map obligations. The United States' position on the fulfilment of those obligations by both Israel and the Palestinians is very clear. We have spoken to them.

I want to note, too, that the international community has other obligations and we need to make certain that we remain focused on them. First, we must support the parties in their bilateral negotiations so that they might come to a lasting peace. Secondly, we must to insist that all parties live up to their road map obligations. Thirdly, we must provide financial assistance, particularly to the Palestinian National Authority. Here, I would like to note that the United States has provided historic levels of assistance to the Authority, including through mechanisms that we have never used before: direct budget support from the American taxpayer to the Palestinian Authority. I would hope that the States of the region will completely fulfil their pledges in an expeditious manner so that the Palestinian Authority can, under the Government of Salam Fayyad, meet its obligations to its people.

However, the international community has other obligations as well. I ask that States of the region — and our Arab colleagues in particular — consider ways that they might reach out to Israel to demonstrate, in word and deed, that it is understood that a comprehensive solution requires full understanding that Israel belongs in the Middle East and will remain in the Middle East as a valued partner. In that regard, I take note of the Arab peace initiative, which is an important step in that direction, but I hope that more can be done.

Finally, it is certainly the obligation of the international community to speak loudly and firmly against terrorism and extremism in all their forms. The taking of innocent life is never acceptable, whatever its justification.

Just as unacceptable is the kind of language that was heard in the General Assembly yet again this week. The President of Iran — who unfortunately represents a great people, the Iranian people, who, as a whole, I believe, do not hold his views — said that another Member of the United Nations should be wiped from the face of the map, destroyed and should not exist. That is simply unacceptable. When the Security Council decides what really needs to taken up as a threat to international peace and security, I believe that that should be at the top of the list.

The United States of America will be asking that the Council convene again to take up the matter of one Member of the United Nations calling for the destruction of another Member of the United Nations in a way that simply should not be allowed, if I may be pardoned for saying so in polite company.

The President (*spoke in French*): I invite His Excellency Mr. Hassan Wirajuda, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, to take the floor.

Mr. Wirajuda (Indonesia): I wish to begin by expressing the appreciation of our delegation to you, Sir, for convening this pertinent and timely meeting on such an important subject.

The conflict in the Middle East is not only protracted but also complex. On the Israeli-Palestinian track alone, the conflict is awash with diverse factors. Core issues include the status of East Jerusalem, the borders of a Palestinian State, settlements in the West Bank, Palestinian refugees, security and water resources.

While recognizing the multifaceted nature of the Middle East conflict, I will focus my statement on the Israeli settlement activity in the occupied Palestinian territories.

Land is an indispensable dimension of every State. By that, I refer to our own land and not that of our neighbour. As Israel's occupation of the Palestinian territories continues and its settlers keep encroaching further into the territory, Palestinians watch their land claims disintegrate before their eyes, making a viable Palestinian State very difficult.

With the construction of settlements in the West Bank having nearly doubled in 2007 and the Israeli authority-backed initiative of new construction in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, in 2008, prospects for a two-State solution are steadily declining.

Israel's settlement policies and practices, which have been aimed at altering the demographic composition, physical character and status of the Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, are nothing but a blatant violation of international law.

Among the provisions of international law that bind an occupier such as Israel are those under the Geneva Conventions, which clearly underline that the occupier must maintain the occupied area as intact and unaltered as possible, without interfering with the customary life of the area and any changes must be necessitated by the immediate needs of the occupation. The transfer of civilians to occupied areas, whether or not in settlements which are under military control, is contrary to the sixth paragraph of article 49 of the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, which clearly states:

> "The Occupying Power shall not deport or transfer parts of its own civilian population into the territory it occupies".

Furthermore, settlement activities are also in contravention of the principle of the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by force, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations. As such, it contravenes Israel's commitment to be faithful to the principles of the Charter.

My delegation is deeply concerned over the negative effect of the settlement activities on the ongoing peace process under the Annapolis framework. President Abbas has stated that Israeli settlement presents the greatest obstacle to the peace process. It is intricately related to and at the crux of nearly all other final status issues. If Israel has a genuine commitment to peace, it must stop all settlement construction, expansion and planning in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem, and dismantle the settlements built therein, in compliance with relevant Security Council resolutions.

Israel must also abide by the obligations under the Road Map and the commitment to the Annapolis goals. Under phase I of the Road Map, Israel bears the

obligation to freeze all settlement activity. Under the Annapolis agreement, Israel agreed to

> "immediately launch good-faith bilateral negotiations in order to conclude a peace treaty, resolving all outstanding issues, including all core issues without exception, as specified in previous agreements".

With regard to the social consequences of settlement activity, we are concerned about the damage caused by unlawful attacks by Israeli settlers against Palestinians, as well as about the limits on freedom of movement. Indonesia therefore wishes to join the Secretary-General, the international community and the Quartet in calling on Israel to end all settlement activity, including natural growth. We also urge the Quartet principals, who will meet later today, to reaffirm their call for the end of Israeli settlement activities.

We attach primary importance to the role of the Security Council in responding to the settlement issue. Back in 1980, through resolution 465 (1980), the Council called on Israel to

> "dismantle the existing settlements and in particular to cease, on an urgent basis, the establishment, construction and planning of settlements in the Arab territories occupied since 1967, including Jerusalem" (*resolution 465 (1980), para. 6*).

We believe that the same step could be taken by the Council in the very near future.

My delegation wishes to reiterate its full support for the efforts to reach the Annapolis goals. Our commitment to an independent, viable and democratic Palestine living side by side in peace and security with its neighbours is absolute. A just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East based on the relevant resolutions of the Council — including resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003) — must prevail. It will be a tragedy for the Palestinians, the Israelis, other nations in the region and, indeed, all humankind, if peace in the region is persistently rejected.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Karel de Gucht, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Belgium.

Mr. De Gucht (Belgium) (*spoke in French*): The position of Belgium and the European Union is a long-standing one. Settlement activities, including in East Jerusalem, are illegal under international law and threaten the viability of the peace process.

Belgium believes it important that the Security Council assume its responsibility with regard to all items on its agenda. That is why we supported the principle of holding a meeting. However, it would be counterproductive to restrict discussion to a single issue. As the agenda item for this morning's meeting indicates — "The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question" — the Council must address all aspects of this issue and the role of all parties, including Hamas and its allies, in order to contribute usefully to the peace process.

The bilateral negotiations jointly launched by the Israelis and the Palestinians in Annapolis with the support of the international community and regional actors are at the heart of the peace process today. Those are the first in-depth negotiations in eight years. They must lead to a peace agreement in order to establish in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip an independent and viable Palestinian State. Such a State should also be able to guarantee coexistence in peace and mutual security to Israel and its citizens.

Those negotiations alone are not enough to provide the Israeli and Palestinian peoples the peace dividends they have awaited for more than 60 years. As the European Union and its Quartet partners have reiterated, as part of that dialogue, the parties must also demonstrate tangible progress and send clear political signals. At stake is the credibility of the process and those involved in it.

It is for that reason that the European Union and the Quartet call for adherence to the Road Map. The Palestinians must expedite the establishment of security structures worthy of a State governed by the rule of law. Those institutions must enjoy the confidence of Palestinian citizens, as well as that of their future Israeli neighbours in the face of terrorist threats. The Israelis must put in place an immediate freeze on settlement activity and dismantle the outposts established since March 2001. By affecting in advance the outcome of negotiations, those activities pose a constant threat to mutual confidence between the parties.

That is also the reason for the active participation of Belgium and its European partners in the success of conferences and international meetings held in Paris, London, Berlin and, this week, in New York. At all those meetings, the European Union, together with its international partners, reaffirmed its support for the necessary economic, political and security reform efforts of the Palestinian Authority, which needs to be maintained by all the international — but also regional — actors.

Recent economic and security progress in the West Bank, especially in Jenin and Nablus, have illustrated the advantage of Prime Minister Fayyad's involvement in carrying out crucial reform as well as the positive impact of enhanced cooperation with Israeli authorities. I encourage all actors to intensify their efforts in that regard. The Israelis should speed up the lifting of restrictions on movement in the West Bank. The Palestinians should continue to take control of their destiny in order to provide the future Palestinian State the economic and security foundations that are crucial to its establishment.

In the context of a future Palestinian State, we cannot forget the fate of the 1.5 million Palestinians in the Gaza Strip. I would like to welcome the overall observance of the truce and the effect it has had on the people concerned in Gaza and southern Israel. However, the truce cannot be end in itself, but should constitute a step towards normalization in the Gaza Strip — and not just in terms of security but also in humanitarian, economic and political terms. It should also lead at last to the release of Corporal Shalit.

With a view to such normalization, I unreservedly condemn the campaign of violence and intimidation being waged by Hamas to gain absolute control over the Gaza Strip. The Palestinian Authority continues to be the sole legitimate institution for all Palestinians, and the only institution acceptable to the international community. In that regard, Belgium supports the mediation of Egypt and the Arab League to achieve the reunification of all the Palestinian territory under the authority of President Abbas.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to Her Excellency Ms. Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma, Minister for Foreign Affairs of South Africa.

Ms. Dlamini Zuma (South Africa): We would like to thank you, Mr. President, for convening this meeting. We would also like to thank the representatives of the League of Arab States, Saudi Arabia, Palestine and Israel for their respective statements. We are pleased that we were able to accommodate the request for this meeting this week.

After the Annapolis Conference, South Africa thought that settlement activity in the occupied Palestinian territories would cease. The settlements are illegal, change the facts on the ground and are a key obstacle to peace. The 1949 Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War prohibits the occupying Power from transferring parts of its own civilian population to the territory it occupies.

My delegation joins the rest of the global community in calling for an end to Israeli settlement activity in occupied Palestinian territory. We urge the Council to demand that Israel immediately and completely freeze all settlement activity, including natural growth, and dismantle outposts erected since March 2001, in order not to change facts on the ground and prejudice final status negotiations.

The deadline set by the Annapolis process for a peace agreement by the end of this year is drawing close. Despite assurances that negotiations are continuing, the situation on the ground has not improved significantly since the start of this process. In fact, in some areas such as settlement activity, it has further deteriorated. Both parties to the negotiation process, Israel and Palestine, have the obligation to commit to the peace process, but any positive political progress must result in visible progress on the ground.

We continue to encourage both Palestinians and Israelis to persist with their negotiations to achieve the goal of the establishment of an independent, economically viable State of Palestine living side by side with Israel, with both States enjoying secure and internationally recognized borders. That vision of a two-State solution has already been enshrined in various United Nations resolutions. But clearly, the increased settlement activity is threatening the possibility of that viable Palestinian State.

We reiterate that the primary responsibility for peace and security lies with the two sides, but that the Security Council should also do its part and not neglect, as it is currently doing, its Charter-mandated responsibility to assist in the attainment of that goal.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now invite His Excellency Mr. Franco Frattini, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Italy, to take the floor.

Mr. Frattini (Italy): We should discuss, as we are doing, the many complex elements of the situation in the Middle East. We all, I am sure, want to work towards reaching a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the region. On the peace process, I think we must safeguard the momentum of the negotiations and keep encouraging the parties to proceed with negotiations. It is important indeed that these last months of negotiations before the end of the year show some concrete achievements. Unfortunately, I think the clock is ticking against peace.

Italy will continue, together with other European States, its determined efforts to build on the Annapolis process. We consider the security of the State of Israel as non-negotiable. We feel that Israeli security can only be truly guaranteed if the Palestinian State has solid institutions founded on the rule of law and good governance. In that regard, I would like to sincerely commend President Abbas for his constant engagement and determination. It is, nevertheless, important that the Arab countries also continue to provide robust public, political and economic support for the efforts of Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas.

The current Israeli settlement policies do not seem to facilitate the fundamental understanding that is needed on both sides to be able to continue the process that was launched in Annapolis with the agreement of both sides. That is why Italy firmly believes that moderation is crucial to the peace process. We understand the delicate nature of this issue for Israelis. However, with the frankness that characterizes a true friendship, we must exhort Israeli leaders to thoroughly reflect on the issue, to come to a more satisfactory solution, to restore international legality and, I would say, to avoid undermining the credibility of Palestinian negotiators before public opinion.

At the same time, the Palestinian Authority must be encouraged in its endeavours to consolidate security, particularly the control and repression of terrorism. The situation in the Gaza Strip, a territory that has suffered for too long, cannot be forgotten. The further worsening of the humanitarian situation and the progressive deterioration of respect for human rights is cause for great concern. In particular, the permanent threat posed by Hamas to Israel is not acceptable. We must also achieve soon the liberation of Mr. Shalit.

In that perspective, intra-Palestinian reconciliation remains fundamental. We welcome once again the commitment of President Abbas, and we support the efforts of the Arab League and Egypt for the full restoration of constitutional legality and the reopening of old crossing points.

Israel will be called upon to make difficult but indispensable decisions in this process. It is, I have to say, to the merit of former Prime Minister Olmert and Foreign Minister Livni that they have publicly recognized that it is in the best interest of Israel to have a solid and democratic Palestinian State on its borders. Our final goal is peace between Israelis and Palestinians, but also between Israel and all the Arab countries.

In the delicate transitional period, the leadership of the Quartet will be crucial. I am confident of the political commitment of all its members — and I stress, all its members.

I would also like to say a brief word on Lebanon. I welcome the Doha agreement and the important political achievements of recent months. I am seriously concerned, and Italy is concerned, about the resurgence of violence with the assassination of Mr. Aridi, which we strongly condemn. We believe in the determination of the Lebanese population to reject any form of provocation and in its will to progress towards reconciliation. We hope that commitments undertaken by Syria on the occasion of President Sleiman's visit to Damascus will be promptly implemented.

We also believe that the negotiations between Syria and Israel will contribute to the comprehensive stabilization of the area. We hope that Syria will become a leading and positive actor for peace and stabilization.

Finally, we reaffirm our support for the independence and sovereignty of Lebanon, and we will continue to play our role in the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon, an important factor for the country's stabilization.

In conclusion, when we talk about security in the Middle East, our top priority is and should be to face the very serious threat posed every day by Iran. We should not forget this.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now invite His Excellency Mr. Bruno Stagno Ugarte, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Costa Rica, to take the floor.

Mr. Stagno Ugarte (Costa Rica) (*spoke in Spanish*): Each new settlement that is built in the occupied territories is a new obstacle in the road to peace. In that regard, the decision of Council members to meet this morning underscores the need to put an end to the ongoing expansion of illegal settlements. We cannot ignore — and Israel should not ignore — the broad consensus within the international community on the need to reverse the growth of the illegal settlements, which contradict the agreed commitments.

However, we must not lose sight of the many other obstacles that also block the road to peace. We cannot ignore how the conduct of each party affects the conduct of the other party, even if it is unjustified. The settlements are not the only cause for concern; we are also concerned about extremism, terrorism, intolerance and violence. My Government certainly does not ignore the mutual commitments that must be made with regard to the core elements of a final agreement. Each of those obstacles and elements deserves our full attention, but above all the attention of the parties most immediately involved — Israel and Palestine.

Costa Rica supported General Assembly resolution 181 (II) of 1947. We were among the 33 countries that recognized early on that, for all its faults, the idea of two States coexisting had to be accepted as being the least bad of all those available. Such a partition would result in the establishment of two independent States and as all know well, in 1948 the State of Israel was established; however, the establishment of the State of Palestine never came about, and here we must recognize the shared responsibility of many.

Since then, we have witnessed one tragedy after another including wars and intifadas, murders andattacks, which have seriously impeded the right of both peoples to live free from fear. At the same time, and without a time frame, we have seen promises and hopes flourish generated by various peace processes, without, however, any peace dividends yet being reaped. Instead, the situation has proved to be a breeding ground for double standards, foreign interference and for the sad repetition of events that have delayed fulfilment of the mandate agreed upon in 1947.

Now we are meeting after more than 60 years of procrastination in regard to the establishment of a Palestinian State in accordance with the stipulations of the General Assembly in 1947. At the same time, it has now been 10 years since the expiration of the deadline established in the declaration of principles of the Oslo Agreements and, once again, we have exceeded the deadline established in the Quartet's Road Map: delay after delay after delay.

The core aspects of the conflict — Jerusalem, refugees, borders and settlements, which is the issue that we are addressing here today — have always been relegated to a second or third phase which has never truly begun, since, important or difficult as they may be, subsidiary or preparatory issues tend to be addressed first. That realization is not new and has been mentioned by many others before. Given that there are multiple actors in the immediate surroundings and also in the region who are interested in impeding the peace process, we listened with profound indignation to the words of the Head of State of Iran, expressly calling for the destruction of the State of Israel. Final negotiations are always premised on resolving difficult issues that are not vital; issues that impact the process but at the same time do not help resolve the situation. Instead, all too many opportunities have been given to those who thrive on intolerance and violence, allowing them to sabotage peace.

In the meantime, with each delay a Palestinian State has been taking shape. Since the universal unilateral declaration of 1988 granting Palestine observer status at the United Nations, followed by the establishment of the Palestinian National Authority that entity has gradually taken on some if not all of the basic features of a State. The decision of the Government of Costa Rica to recognize the State of Palestine on 5 February 2008 was based not only on resolution 181 (II) and on the fact that the current Palestinian State unites many of the basic characteristics of a state, but also on a well-founded understanding of the reasons for the various interruptions in the peace process and the complicated manoeuvres of the political forces in the region.

In the Middle East there are shared but differentiated responsibilities. None of the parties has done all that is necessary to create an environment conducive to a definitive solution to the conflict. It has been an asymmetrical conflict, with asymmetrical

concessions and consequences. There is not absolute parity between the parties, even if reciprocity must prevail.

It is time for both parties to accept that peace comes at a price and requires painful and uncomfortable concessions, but the price will always be far less than the cost of war. Otherwise, intolerance, violence and mistrust will continue and in that environment, unfortunately, we will have to once again face more extremism and terrorism.

The ongoing negotiations between Israel and Palestine appear to be leading towards agreement on key aspects. The presence in this Chamber of representatives of Arab countries that are concerned about the events in the region and that have sometimes, played an active role in their development, offers a timely opportunity to call on those countries to play a constructive role that will further develop the factors conducive to mutual respect and understanding between the parties.

We want peace and we support peace for the simple reason that both peoples more than deserve peace. In that regard, we urge the parties to meet their commitments to establish verifiable and sustainable progress on the ground through the establishment of new agreements that will lead towards the peace that both peoples so deserve.

The President (*spoke in French*): I invite His Excellency Mr. David Miliband, Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, to address the Council.

Mr. Miliband (United Kingdom): The peace process is a process that commands legitimacy and consent from all parties. At the moment, in the peace process, the international community needs more than ever to demonstrate in word and indeed the ability to make a practical contribution to progress and to avoid the posturing that undermines those seeking a durable settlement. If we fail to show faith in that process and fail to show the courage to pursue it, then the great prize of peace, justice and security for Israelis and Palestinians side by side will become remote.

In the view of the United Kingdom, the Annapolis process has again shown the necessity of strong United States leadership. An agreement has not yet been reached under the Annapolis process, but the two parties are talking again — seriously and in detail — about a final settlement.

We do not agree that the current process is worse than useless or worse than the alternative. During the course of the last nine months, the Palestinian Authority has been addressing the challenges of economic and security sector reform. The ceasefire in Gaza has been established. It is fragile but holding. Turkey has helped bring together Israel and Syria for talks. There is progress on reforms inside the Palestinian Authority and as I saw for myself, cooperation around Jenin shows that when we have local engagement we can make local progress. I also believe that the process has helped to restate the fundamentals of peace: two States based on 1967 borders, secure, at peace and democratic, with Jerusalem as the capital for both and a just and agreed settlement for refugees.

The critical issue in the coming weeks and months will be to ensure that those processes are durable and that we do not fall back into a vicious circle of violence. In our view, that means three responsibilities for all of us. First, the responsibility of the international community to reiterate its unanimous support for the process launched at Annapolis. We look forward to strong messages from the Quartet meeting this afternoon and from regional partners. The parties need to stick with what will be a difficult process involving compromises on both sides.

Secondly, we must continue to support those working for peace with practical measures. The United Kingdom is helping to support the Palestinian Authority in the development of its security structures. We are working closely with the Authority in support of its economic development plan, including through a $500 million support package. Those responsibilities in the areas of security and the economy need to be fulfilled right across the region as well as in the European Union.

Thirdly, all parties must support the prospects for peace. The United Kingdom has repeatedly made it clear that settlement-building, contrary to Road Map commitments and the aim of the two-State solution, is wrong and should stop. Israel's need for security is best served by a strong Palestinian security force and a functioning Palestinian economy free of restrictions on movement and access. At the same time, however, the brutal actions of Hamas and its supporters only make

that harder. The armament and rearmament of Hizbullah represent a grievous threat to peace in the region.

In addition, we will all have seen and must deplore the egregiously offensive comments made by President Ahmadinejad in the General Assembly on Tuesday. I am truly sorry that the Council could not find unity in a denunciation of those remarks today. The remarks refer to "a cesspool created by itself and its supporters". That is no way to talk about another State Member of the United Nations, but it is a quotation from the President of Iran on Tuesday this week.

There is a real risk that, if we do not capture the progress achieved by Annapolis, we will slip backwards. It is vital that we sustain the process into and through 2009 — a process built on democratic consent, international legitimacy and the trust of the parties. Annapolis has begun that process and needs to be taken further.

That means recognizing the historic opportunity afforded by the Arab Peace Initiative and building on the Israeli-Syrian opening. We should forge a new momentum, a genuinely comprehensive approach, building on those elements. The peoples of the region cannot afford another 50 years of conflict.

But we have a choice: now is the time to look forward, not to look at the past and point fingers. The people of the Middle East need strong and determined leadership focused on the common elements of their future, not the failings of the past. That is the sort of leadership we are determined to support.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now invite His Excellency Mr. Gordan Jandroković, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Croatia, to take the floor.

Mr. Jandroković (Croatia): In considering the situation in the Middle East over the course of this year, my delegation has continued to be guided by one word: "hope". Indeed, 2008 seems to be a year of hope for peace in the Middle East. While there was nothing a year ago, now we have the Annapolis process under way, solid and substantive. The parties are negotiating regularly and at all levels. There have been challenges, and there will be further challenges. But that should not be used to distract or derail the talks.

The efforts that the parties are investing in the process should be praised. The international community, including the Council, should do its utmost to support them in making the compromises required to achieve the shared goal of arriving at an agreement in accordance with the agreed terms of reference by the end of this year. And even if the process takes longer than foreseen, that will in no way diminish the commitment of the parties, nor will it diminish the hope for peace.

We have listened with attention to the speakers this morning. Over the past months, we in the Council have been closely following the process and have repeatedly voiced concerns over the gap persisting between the vigorous political engagement and developments on the ground. We recognize the need to make tangible progress on the ground by implementing mutual Road Map obligations and by refraining from confidence-eroding steps, which could negatively affect the dynamics of the peace talks.

The issue of settlements is a sensitive and difficult one, and it is being addressed by the parties within the framework of bilateral talks. The settlement activities have also been addressed by key international actors, including the Quartet. The Quartet will meet again in a couple of hours' time, followed by an iftar with Arab partners, hosted by the Secretary-General. The Quartet meeting is taking place at a critical moment and offers an opportunity to review and take stock of the process in all its aspects. It should be an opportunity to send a clear and effective message of encouragement and guidance to the negotiating parties.

Croatia is mindful of the challenges that the parties and the peace process face, but we should not lose sight of the overall framework of the process or of timing and contextual considerations. We believe that none of the obligations arising from the Road Map can be read in isolation from the others: they are mutual obligations, arising for both sides, and need to be assessed together, in their totality.

We understand that both sides are making an effort to improve conditions on the ground and that much more can be done. We are pleased by the signals indicating that the downward slide of the past few years has been halted in the West Bank. We appreciate the reform efforts that the Palestinian Authority is making under the able leadership of Mr. Fayyad, and we hope that that momentum can be continued and augmented through consistent donor support.

The ability of the Palestinian Authority to build credible institutions and to manage security and law and order is of key importance for both sides. Not only is it an essential element of Palestinian State-building; it is also a legitimate expectation of the Israeli side. Israel must have confidence that the two-State solution will not compromise the safety and security of its citizens. That can be achieved only if there is a viable, responsible and democratic Palestinian State by its side — a State that is willing and able to combat terrorism and anarchy.

This is a crucial time for the peace process; we should be careful not to abandon or destroy it. The objective is clear and well established: a two-State solution with a safe and secure Israel and a democratic, viable and peaceful Palestinian State, living side by side within secure and recognized borders.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now invite His Excellency Mr. Alexander Saltanov, Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, to take the floor.

Mr. Saltanov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): The problem that we are discussing today in the context of the situation in the Middle East is one of the most sensitive in terms of deciding the final status of the Palestinian territories. The way in which it is resolved will largely determine the future configuration and solidity of peace between the Palestinians and the Israelis. Therefore, today's discussion is useful and timely.

Our approach is defined by the relevant resolutions of the Security Council, in particular resolution 242 (1967), which refers to the West Bank and the Gaza Strip as occupied territories, with all of the ensuing international legal consequences. We believe that the settlement activities are illegal. In addition, the restrictions imposed on the Palestinians' freedom of movement and the Israeli incursions into areas administered by the Palestinian National Authority have been major irritants in the Annapolis negotiations and within the framework of the Road Map.

I wish to recall the Joint Understanding announced following the meeting in Annapolis in November 2007, according to which:

> "The parties also commit to immediately implement their respective obligations under the Performance-Based Road Map".

As members are aware, that document calls for the parties to refrain from taking any action that would determine the final status of the Palestinian territories and for a freeze on all settlement activities, including so-called natural population growth.

The failure to abide by those obligations has created serious difficulties in the Israeli-Palestinian talks. It has also negatively affected the political situation of the Palestinian National Authority and complicated the management of such sensitive problems as Jerusalem. More important, it calls into question the possibility of establishing a unique and viable, territorially connected Palestinian State.

The complex talks currently under way are far from being concluded. Therefore, the parties must refrain from taking steps that create new realities on the ground, which would hamper the reaching of an agreement. Of course, this also applies to the Palestinian side. The Palestinians must also fully comply with their obligations, in particular in the area of security. As everyone is aware, the Palestinian leadership has achieved much, but much remains to be done.

Right now it is important to encourage the sides, including through the Security Council, to continue talks to settle final status issues, including the question of the settlements. This would help in moving towards a comprehensive resolution of the Israeli-Arab conflict on a generally recognized international legal basis.

That is the goal of Russia's policy in the Middle East. We intend to actively help to advance this as a member of the Quartet of international mediators as well as in our national capacity.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya.

Mr. Ettalhi (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like first of all to welcome the President of the Palestinian National Authority, His Excellency Mr. Mahmoud Abbas, and the Ministers who are present at today's meeting.

I will not conceal the fact that I always hesitate before taking the floor to address the Council when it

discusses the Palestinian question in any of its aspects. That is because I know that this issue has been on the agenda of the United Nations and of the Security Council, which is responsible for the maintenance of international peace and security, for more than six decades. This situation has existed for six decades now, with everything that this implies in terms of war and humanitarian tragedy: six decades during which the Security Council has adopted a series of resolutions, none of which, unfortunately, have been implemented.

In fact, these days, when it comes to Palestinian issues, the Council sometimes even refrains from issuing a press release, no matter how grave the situation it has discussed.

Perhaps appearance of the Arab Group before the Security Council to ask the Council to listen to it represents a new phase concerning this subject. Unfortunately, this is the first time in the history of the Council that a State or a group of States has told the Council that all it wishes is the opportunity to express itself in this Chamber. Is this not important for the Council?

Should it not lead us to wonder what occurs every time the Israelis begin negotiations with Palestinians? What happens is an acceleration of the settlement policy and an increase in the number of settlements, which has risen considerably since the Oslo Agreement, whose anniversary was commemorated some days ago. Everyone knows that settlement activity has increased in an unprecedented manner — and I do mean unprecedented — since the Annapolis Conference.

I am basing my comments on this subject on an Israeli report. As Mr. Mahmoud Abbas said this morning, the Israelis know full well what is taking place on the ground. This report, which was published by an Israeli non-governmental organization (NGO), compares the settlement policy for the first quarter of this year with the same quarter in 2007. It says that construction activities increased by 55 per cent and that the number of tenders for new settlement construction bids increased by 550 per cent. Thus, the settlement policy in the occupied Palestinian territories has increased considerably at an accelerated pace since the Annapolis Conference, held last year.

All of this has happened despite the commitments made pursuant to the Road Map and in spite of the outcome of the Annapolis Conference and in spite of international resolutions which reaffirm the illegality of the settlement activities and call on the Israeli occupation authorities to put an end to such activities and to dismantle the settlements that have been erected.

In spite of this, the Israeli authorities have intensified this form of activity in the West Bank especially around Jerusalem. Everyone is aware of the Israeli construction of the apartheid separation wall despite the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice.

Settlement activity not only impedes the peace process; even more, that policy serves the declared Israeli aim of sabotaging the very notion of the emergence of an independent, viable Palestinian State. This poses a serious threat to both regional and international peace and security.

In this regard, I would also like to cite an Israeli report from which I will draw attention to a number of extracts. Hundreds of thousands of dunums of Palestinian land have been usurped and used for the construction or expansion of numerous Jewish settlements. The Israeli authorities prevent all Palestinians from gaining access to these territories. They exploit the existence of settlements in order to justify their continued violation of numerous Palestinian rights, including the right to residence, the right to a livelihood and the right to movement. The report indicates that Israel's radical changes to the map of the West Bank will prevent any possibility of building an independent and viable Palestinian State, in accordance with the right to self-determination. I point out that this is testimony contained in an Israeli report.

Settlement activity policy is an established, systematic policy of successive Israeli Governments. The Israeli authorities have used and continue to use every means available to them and do not hesitate to seize land under any pretext for the purpose of establishing Jewish settlements. They transfer settlers to this land and encourage settlers to expand by giving them housing allowances and tax breaks and by making investments.

The Israeli authorities encourage the settlers to tighten their grip on Palestinians and their land, compelling them to leave their land. As President Mahmoud Abbas stated this morning, the settlers have not hesitated to resort to violence against Palestinians and their property. This has happened in the full view of the occupying forces, who protect the settlers while

ignoring complaints lodged by the Palestinians. I would like to refer here to the daily attacks on villages in the Nablus area — attacks perpetuated against the Palestinian people by the settlers. The most recent of such attacks resulted in the torching of dozens of olive groves in the village of Awarta on 14 September. There was a wave of assaults on Palestinians in the village of Burin on 13 September, resulting in six Palestinian deaths and eight serious injuries.

I also wish to convey another testimony reported to us. Israel has established a system of apartheid within the occupied Palestinian territories, exemplified by the establishment of two separate judiciary entities in the same region, where the human rights of an individual are based on his nationality. Such a unique system reminds us of the apartheid regime in South Africa. The report that just quoted also indicates that the territories are controlled by various means, including systematic violence against Palestinians by settlers, with the support of the Israeli army, that has also led to the expulsion of Palestinians from areas around the settlements.

It is often said that the settlement policy is based on security considerations. Establishing a link between security and settlements is unfortunately an attempt to justify Israel's acts of violence and serves as a pretext for Israel to continue to benefit from international protection. I should like to refer to a passage from a World Bank report detailing the constraints that Israel has imposed under the pretext of security but which merely extend the settlement policy and the expansion of settlements. The report stresses the fact that the Palestinian Authority has made great efforts to honour its commitment to the road map, to ensure respect for the rule of law and to extend its authority over its territory. However, those efforts have been largely undermined by Israel's acts of violence. Thus, Israel's pretexts have nothing to do with security.

I reiterate that Israel's settlement policy is systematic and rooted in the aspiration to a Greater Israel. It reminds us of David Ben-Gurion's vision, as reflected in his view that there was no reason for Israel to negotiate with the Arabs as they both bid claim to the same thing. That means that the Israelis believe that Palestinian territory is in fact Israeli territory and that it is impossible to ascertain the extent to which the Palestinian territories are indeed Palestinian. That Israeli practice must be halted. It is a breeding ground for lasting instability in the region and a clear incitement to violence. Is that what he really wanted?

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Viet Nam.

Mr. Le Luong Minh (Viet Nam): I thank you, Sir, and your delegation for convening this necessary and timely debate.

My delegation shares the deep concerns voiced both by Council members and by the Arab League in its ministerial meeting in Cairo on 8 September regarding the illegal settlement activities undertaken by Israel in the occupied Palestinian territories, especially in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. It is profoundly worrisome that Israel has nearly doubled its settlement construction in the occupied West Bank since 2007.

We associate ourselves with the position of the Non-Aligned Movement in the declaration on Palestine issued at its fifteenth ministerial conference in July 2008, which points to the illegality of Israel's construction and expansion of settlements, particularly in and around occupied East Jerusalem. We also concur with Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon in his remark that Israel's continued settlement activities run counter to the Fourth Geneva Convention and to the very commitment it has made in accordance with the road map and the Annapolis process.

We hold that Israel's continuation and expansion of illegal settlements in the Palestinian occupied territories not only pose a serious obstacle to the effective conduct of Israeli-Palestinian peace talks, resumed after a year-long delay, but also grossly violate the land-for-peace principle, one of the cornerstones of the Middle East peace process. We urge Israel to cease such illegal practices, including measures to change the status, character and demographic composition of East Jerusalem, and to fully respect and implement resolutions 446 (1979), 452 (1979) and 465 (1980), as well as other relevant resolutions adopted by the Security Council on the issue of Israeli settlements.

Israel's settlement activities will only deepen the enmity and confrontation between Israel and the Palestinian people, thus failing to ensure Israel's long-term security interests. We join the Non-Aligned Movement, the Arab League and the Quartet in urging Israel to put an immediate end to such settlement activities.

As noted by Mr. Robert Serry, the United Nations Special Coordinator, at the Council's last consultations, the Middle East peace process is now at the crossroads. We call upon Israel and Palestine to work together and take reciprocal steps to resolve the issue of settlement in accordance with the road map, the Annapolis process and relevant resolutions of the Security Council and the General Assembly. Viet Nam will continue to support the efforts of the international community, the regional stakeholders and the Quartet to facilitate the search for a satisfactory solution to the issue under discussion today.

The President (*spoke in French*): I give the floor to the representative of China.

Mr. Li Kexin (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): The Chinese delegation thanks you, Sir, for convening this meeting at the request of the League of Arab States. I also welcome the participation of the representatives of Saudi Arabia, the Arab League, Palestine and Israel.

The convening of the Annapolis conference last November provided a valuable opportunity, most rare in recent years, to achieve peace in the Middle East. With the Annapolis deadline fast approaching, the international community is waiting with ardent hopes to see practical results emerge from the Israeli-Palestinian talks. In recent months, the leaders of Israel and Palestine have met on a regular basis and a bilateral negotiating group has kept the negotiating process alive.

We welcome those developments. However, as was indicated by Mr. Robert Serry in his latest briefing to the Security Council, there is now a huge gap in the negotiation process. It is imperative for the political talks to produce a specific result.

While we wait for progress in the negotiations, we cannot neglect the grave situation on the ground. Since the talks are not being conducted in a vacuum, the situation on ground provides both the context and the subject matter to be addressed in such talks. It is not hard to appreciate that an ongoing improvement in the situation on the ground would help foster favourable conditions for such talks.

However, it is matter of concern that the humanitarian situation in Gaza has continued to deteriorate this year and that Palestinians in the West Bank are facing many hardships in their lives. It is also a matter of concern that Israel has continued its construction and expansion of settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories. Not only is that a violation of its obligations under international law, but it has also weakened the political foundation for the peace talks. It has also made it more difficult to implement the programme to establish two States side by side. We call upon Israel to respond positively to the appeal of the international community on the issue of settlements. As a first step, it should forthwith freeze any new construction or expansion of settlements.

The road map for the Middle East peace process sets forth obligations for the various parties. The parties concerned should demonstrate their good will by earnestly fulfilling their obligations. It is critical to ensure that no one wait for the others to take the very first step.

The international community and the countries concerned should step up their efforts to advocate conciliation and peace talks. The meeting of the Quartet to be held later today will provide an important opportunity to that end. We hope that the Quartet will help to accelerate this negotiation process.

China supports the establishment of a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East through political dialogue on the basis of the relevant United Nations resolutions, the principle of land for peace and the Arab peace initiative. As an important organ entrusted with the mandate to maintain world peace and stability, the Security Council should and can play an important role in that regard. We support the efforts of the Security Council to that end.

The President (*spoke in French*): I give the floor to the representative of Panama.

Mr. Arias (Panama) (*spoke in Spanish*): Panama recognizes the importance of this meeting, which was convened at the request of Saudi Arabia with the aim of briefing the Security Council on the extension and consequences of the occupation of Palestinian territories by Israel.

In that regard, Panama is aware that the situation in the Middle East is too complex to focus merely on one aspect of the conflict. At the same time, Panama reiterates that the occupation of Palestinian territory by Israel, besides being illegal and in violation of the human rights of the Palestinian people, is a significant obstacle to progress in the peace process and the early establishment of two States, Israel and Palestine, living

in peace and harmony between themselves and with their neighbours. We therefore echo the resounding call of the international community for Israel to immediately cease the construction of settlements in Palestinian territories.

The President (*spoke in French*): I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Burkina Faso.

I would like to thank Mr. Amre Moussa, Mr. Mahmoud Abbas, His Royal Highness Prince Saud Al-Faisal of Saudi Arabia and Ms. Shalev for their statements, and particularly for the light that they have shed on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. I would also like to thank all other speakers who preceded me for their statements.

The position of my country is very clear. Burkina Faso has always held that negotiations should hold sway over the military option in order to resolve a conflict. We wish to reiterate that call for dialogue, which is crucial for bringing the parties closer together and the only way that can lead to the establishment of two sovereign and independent States, Palestine and Israel, coexisting side by side in peace and security, as desired by the international community.

Very fortunately, we are seeing some encouraging signs. Annapolis and many other previous agreements charted the way for that cohabitation. It is important now to demonstrate the political will to transform wishes into reality. Other promising signs include the ongoing regular contacts within the framework of the Annapolis process, a relative calm observed following the truce secured by Egypt, and the release of Palestinian prisoners.

However, those very encouraging signs are not enough to restore trust. Many other aspects of the question require a greater effort on the part of both parties. I refer to the persistent threats that do not reassure Israel and Israel's pursuit of its settlement policy in the Palestinian territories.

All initiatives, whether they come from the Quartet, the League of Arab States — which managed to bring Lebanon out of its deadlock — or any other State, deserve support from the Security Council and the international community. At stake are the interests of the peoples of the Middle East, in particular the Palestinian and Israeli peoples.

I now resume my functions as President of the Security Council.

There are no further speakers inscribed on my list. The Security Council has thus concluded the present stage of its consideration of the item on its agenda.

The meeting rose at 1.30 p.m.